Canada

CCG HOVERCRAFT UNIT

The Canadian Coast Guard's Hovercraft Unit is an important link in a network of Coast Guard, government and private vessels (large and small) that make up the search and rescue organization on the West Coast.

When a call from a vessel or aircraft in distress comes in, all vessels hearing the "mayday" respond. The message is immediately passed through the nearest Coast Guard radio station to the Rescue Coordination Centre (RCC) in Victoria. The RCC then dispatches appropriate resources.

The three West Coast hovercraft provide search and rescue coverage in the Strait of Georgia including Howe Sound, the Gulf Islands, San Juan Islands, the east coast of Vancouver Island north to Desolation Sound, the lower mainland from south Pender Island to Cherry Point, Washington and the Fraser River.

Two craft operate from the southern edge of Vancouver International Airport on Sea Island and the third one operates from the Parksville area on Vancouver Island.

Stricken vessels and aircraft are not the only emergencies requiring the aid of the hovercraft or other search and rescue equipment. Frequently, the hovercraft will transport sick and injured people from isolated areas to hospitals in Victoria or Vancouver. The hovercraft has also been used to assist police.

In 1973 the first hovercraft, the SRN 5, was transferred from general Coast Guard duties and re-assigned to a primary search and rescue mission. In 1977 a larger hovercraft, the SRN 6, joined the unit. The latest addition was in the spring of 1982, when Coast Guard engineers rebuilt a third hovercraft by adapting an old SRN 6 hull. With a third craft, a sub-base on Vancouver Island has been opened to expand coverage in the upper Strait of Georgia area.

The three vehicles enable the unit to provide search and rescue service 24 hours a day, 365 days a year and to substantially increase its involvement in other Coast Guard duties as a secondary role.

The hovercraft are each powered by a single 1000 h.p. Rolls Royce Marine Gnome gas turbine engine and are equipped with AM and FM VHF radios, HF single band radio, CB radio, and both VHF and HF direction finding equipment.

The 3-member crew is fully trained and the craft fully equipped to handle first aid and search and rescue operations. Such equipment as a comprehensive first-aid kit, two 60-million candle power search lights, life rafts, towing, fire-fighting equipment and spare fuel for stranded mariners are carried. In addition, all hovercraft have structural modifications enabling them to carry out search and rescue duties more effectively.

The three West Coast hovercraft are the only air cushioned vehicles dedicated to a search and rescue role in the Canadian Coast Guard. A fourth one is stationed in Montreal for icebreaking and aids to navigation assistance.

CANADIAN COAST GUARD SEARCH AND RESCUE

Name	Type	Length	Base
GEORGE E. DARBY	600 Class Cutter	56 M	Prince Rupert/ Victoria
RIDER	R Class Cutter	29 M	Vancouver
RACER	R Class Cutter	29 M	Victoria
READY (In reserve)	R Class Cutter	29 M	Victoria
CG 123	400 Class Cutter	21 M	Prince Rupert
CG 125	400 Class Cutter	21 M	Campbell River
CG 122	Launch	13.2 M	Ganges
CG 106	Lifeboat	13.4 M	Bull Harbour
CG 105	Lifeboat	13.4 M	Tofino
CG 104	Lifeboat	13.4 M	Bamfield
CG 156	Launch	12 M	Kitsilano
SWIFT	Launch	8 M	Kitsilano
MOORHEN (In reserve)	Launch	12.2 M	Kitsilano
RELITE	Launch	12 M	Powell River
CG 021	SRN 5 Hovercraft	11.8 M	Vancouver
CG 039	SRN 6 Hovercraft	14.7 M	Vancouver
CG 045	SRN 6 Hovercraft	14.7 M	Vancouver

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